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# Mesmerism, Hypnosis and Jewish Mystics in Vienna in the Early Twentieth Century

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How wild, anarchic and unreal were those years, years in which, with the dwindling value of money all other values in Austria and Germany began to slip! [...] Every extravagant idea that was not subject to regulation reaped a golden harvest: theosophy, occultism, spiritualism, somnambulism, anthroposophy, palm-reading, graphology, yoga and Paracelsism. (Stefan Zweig)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See below, n. 66. This article was written with the support of the Center for Austrian Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and of the City of Vienna, for which I would like to express my sincere and deepest gratitude. I would like to thank Prof. Moshe Idel and Prof. Jonathan Garb for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this paper.

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## A. Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism

In 1921 a short Hebrew book was published in Vienna, entitled *Tena'ei HaNefesh LeHasagat HeHasidut* [*Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism*] by Rabbi Menachem Ekstein (1884-1942).<sup>2</sup> The author was a Dzików Hasid,<sup>3</sup> from Rzesów in the center of western Galicia, who immigrated to Vienna following World War I.<sup>4</sup> The reader will immediately notice that modern issues of psychology, such as self-awareness, split mind, and complex, daring “guided imagery” exercises, appear and play a central role in this book.<sup>5</sup> In 1937, Ekstein wrote in the introduction to the Yiddish translation of this book<sup>6</sup> that he purported to define the basic principles of Hasidism anew: “In this book, I have made a *first attempt* to find the appropriate definitions and proper style to express the fundamental principles of Hasidism.”<sup>7</sup> Ekstein begins his book with these words:

The first principle that Hasidism tells all that knock at its gates and wish to enter its inner chambers is: Know thyself [...], to rise all natural tendencies of your soul, and become very familiar with them. Split yourself into two: a natural human being, who dwells down on earth, lives daily life, and is affected by all outside events [...],

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<sup>2</sup> Dating is based on information I found in the Polish State Archives in Rzesów. Ekstein’s birth certificate appears there in Microfilm no. 533/62, pp. 332-333. For more on this author, including his essays published in different Hebrew and Yiddish *Agudat Israel* journals and his manuscripts held in the personal archives at the National Library of Israel, see Daniel Reiser, *Vision as a Mirror: Imagery Techniques in Twentieth-Century Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2014), 225-236 (Hebrew).

<sup>3</sup> On Dzików Hasidism, see Yitzhak Alfasi, *The Kingdom of Wisdom: The Court of Ropczyce-Dzików* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1994) (Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the Ekstein family, see Moshe Yaari-Wald, ed., *Rzesów Jews: Memorial Book* (Tel Aviv, 1968), 280 (Hebrew); Berish Weinstein, *Rzesów: A Poem* (New York, 1947), 16-20, 58 (Yiddish).

<sup>5</sup> Menachem Ekstein, *Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism* (Vienna, 1921) (Hebrew). The book came out in its second edition with omissions and changes, titled *Mavo LeTorat HaHasidut* [*Introduction to the Doctrine of Hasidism*] (Tel Aviv, 1960). This edition was reedited and its division into chapters and sections did not accord with the original edition. The omissions were mainly things bearing a trace of “Zionism” and “sexuality.” The book was published for the third time by penitent Breslov Hasidim in 2006 according to the 1948 structure (i.e., the censorship continues) with the title: *Tena'ei HaNefesh LeHasagat HaHasidut: Madrikh LeHitbonnenut Yehudit* [*Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism: A Guide for Jewish Contemplation*] (Beitar Illit: Makhon Even Shtiya, 2005). It was translated into English as: Menachem Ekstein, *Visions of a Compassionate World: Guided Imagery for Spiritual Growth and Social Transformation*, trans. Y. Starett (New York and Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> The translation appeared in the monthly periodical *Bes Yankev: Literarische Shrift far Shul un Heym Dint di Inyonim fun Bes Yankev Shuln un Organizatsyes Bnos Agudas Yisroel in Poyln, Lodzh-Varshes-Kroke* [*Beth Jacob: Literary Periodical for School and Home Serving the Interests of Beth Jacob Schools and the Organization of Benoth Agudath Israel in Poland, Łodz-Warsaw-Cracow*]. The publication began in Iyyar 5697 (1937), issue 142, and stopped when an end was put to the publication (after issue 158, Av 5699) as a result of the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. The translation covers about half of the original work.

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis in the original. The passage is cited as an introduction to the Hebrew edition, *Mavo LeTorat HaHasidut*, 16.

and a supernal person, who is not drawn by the outside events, and is not affected by them, but sits up in his own palace, in a high tower, and constantly looks down at the lower person, and sees all the things that are befalling him, and all the actions that are drawn from them onto his soul. He [the supernal person] gazes at all these and recognizes them; he examines them, and is able to direct them and use them as he wishes.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, according to Ekstein, the fundamental basis of Hasidism, shockingly, is not knowledge of God, nor the religious commandments, nor basic Hasidic theological ideas such as “nullification of the world” (*bittul ha-yesh*), “serving God through the physical world” (*avoda be-gashmiyyut*), or “clinging to the divine” (*devekut*). Rather, the fundamental basis of Hasidism is a universal psychological concept – self-awareness, which gives the practitioner full control over his soul and his personal inclinations.

An instructive parallel is Hillel Zeitlin (1871-1942), for he, too, a decade earlier (1910), had tried to define the basic principles of Hasidut – but in concepts such as “being and naught,” *tsimstum* (“divine contraction”), “the power of the Divine Affecter on the one being affected,” “elevating sparks,” “elevating foreign thoughts,” and “elevating base qualities.”<sup>9</sup> Ekstein’s objective is different. Zeitlin collected a number of concepts from the students of the Baal Shem Tov, and attempted to present them in a consistent and systematic way as the foundations of Hasidic thought. Ekstein, however, presented modern psychological ideas and thus universalized Hasidism. Moreover, Ekstein’s book presents guided imagery exercises for the reader, with very specific, precise instructions,<sup>10</sup> and thus is an example of a modern literary genre, corresponding to the genre of popular self-help books of the early twentieth century, which give readers advice on how to improve their lives on their own.<sup>11</sup> Even Moses is described as a spiritual instructor – *the* spiritual instructor, the ultimate psychologist of all humanity, who was able to uncover the deep layers of the soul and understand the unconscious: “Moses was the greatest teacher in the entire universe, of all time, and there was none like him either before or afterwards; he understood the entire depth of

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<sup>8</sup> *Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Hillel Zeitlin, *Hasidut LeShittoteha UZerameha* [*Hasidism: Approaches and Streams*] (Warsaw, 1910) (Hebrew).

<sup>10</sup> See *Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism*, 3-5, 13.

<sup>11</sup> See Tomer Persico, “Jewish Meditation: The Development of a Modern Form of Spiritual Practice in Contemporary Judaism” (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2012), 293 (Hebrew).

the human soul, and its relationship to all things in the universe, and their effects on it.”<sup>12</sup>

Ekstein developed various imagery exercises, which are essentially different from imagery exercises found in Kabbalistic and Hasidic literature. Ekstein’s exercises constitute an additional step in the development of imagination in Jewish mysticism. In the prophetic Kabbalah of the twelfth century, the imagery techniques are mainly of a linguistic nature: God’s name, in various forms and permutations, becomes a basis for imagery. Linguistic imagery exercises are found also in sixteenth-century Kabbalah, both that of Luria and that of Cordovero. In Hasidic books from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, additional imagery exercises begin to appear, which involve imagining a specific short scene, such as the image of jumping into fire, the image of God, the image of death, the image of a righteous person, and others.<sup>13</sup> Ekstein’s imagery exercises, however, are composed of multiple scenes that come together to form a long, complex plot, similar to a dream or a film, as he himself says: “We can imagine in front of us five, ten, or twenty different scenes, which pass in front of our spiritual eyes, image after image, as in a *Kino* [movie].”<sup>14</sup> There is no significant precedent for this style, as far as I know, before the late nineteenth or earlier twentieth century, whether in Hasidic literature or in Jewish literature of any kind.

However, there is similarity between Ekstein’s imagery exercises and similar practices that developed in modern Western psychology, and particularly in hypnosis. This similarity is tantalizing: what led Ekstein, who was living in 1920s Vienna, to present Hasidism in this way, and what was his relationship to modern psychology? In this article I will attempt to answer these questions, and through them to understand the

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<sup>12</sup> *Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> See Reiser, *Vision as a Mirror*, 113-118. Although all these exercises have precedents in Zoharic and Kabbalistic literature, and it is not the case that Hasidic books do not have linguistic imagery exercises – nonetheless, I find that there is a transformation from a period when the linguistic imagery is central (alongside other exercises taking only a side role) to a period when the visual scene is the main characteristic (alongside some linguistic imagery exercises).

<sup>14</sup> *Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism*, 8. The word *Kino* means “movie” in German. Ekstein’s glosses on the Hebrew are in German in Hebrew letters (not in Yiddish). Ekstein also recommends imagining multiple scenes that are the opposites of each other: “One should train one’s brain also [to visualize] opposites [...] for these are good tests of the brain’s quickness and agility, *übungen zur Elastizität des Gehirns*” – that is: “exercises for the brain’s flexibility (elasticity).” It is interesting that Ekstein explains himself in German, and not Yiddish, in a book that views itself as part of the Hasidic corpus. (In Yiddish, the equivalent words would be: *genitungen far der baygevdikayt fun di gehirn*.) This fact may be evidence of the author’s intended audience; at the time that he published this book he was living in Vienna, where the German language was dominant even among the Jews. Moreover, until World War I Galicia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where there was German influence even among Hasidim.

broader, more encompassing interaction between Hasidic psychology and modern psychology, which became possible in the German-speaking region of Central Europe, and specifically in Vienna, after World War I.

## B. Mesmerism, Hypnosis, and Modern Psychology

In 1774 the German physiologist Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) had a huge success in Vienna when he managed to heal Franzl Oesterlin, a young woman of twenty-eight. Franzl had been suffering from hysteria, which was causing her seizures and paralysis. Mesmer instructed her to swallow a solution containing iron, and affixed three magnets to her body. Franzl felt a fluid running throughout her body, her paralysis was healed, and her pains were gone.<sup>15</sup> Mesmer quickly became famous throughout Europe. Doctors from throughout the continent sent their patients to Vienna to be treated by him. In addition, Mesmer traveled throughout Europe out of an interest in treating epilepsy, and thus gained additional fame.<sup>16</sup>

Franz Mesmer was born in the small town of Iznang, close to the German shore of Lake Constance. He studied in Vienna, specializing in medicine, at a time when a mixture of Newtonianism and astrology was accepted by the medical field. Mesmer announced his discovery of the “supernal fluid” (“fluidum”), which is found circulating through the whole body; he called this fluid “the agent of nature,” which supplies heat, light, electricity, and magnetism. He especially praised this fluid’s medical qualities.<sup>17</sup> Mesmer claimed that diseases result from a blockage of the flow of fluidum in parts of the body; he argued that the activity of the fluidum corresponded to that of a “magnet.” At the same time, Mesmer claimed that there are people who have the ability to take control of the flow and activity of the fluidum by using “magnetism” (a practice that would eventually be called “mesmerizing” in English), that is, using magnets to massage the “polarities” in the body, and thus to overcome the blockage. He would discharge the blockage by inducing some sort of “crisis,” sometimes a shock or

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<sup>15</sup> Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 58-59. We find a description of her recovery in the amazement of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), who wrote, in a letter to his father, that Franzl had changed beyond recognition as a result of Mesmer’s treatment. See Margaret Goldsmith, *Franz Anton Mesmer: The History of an Idea* (London: A. Barker, 1934), 57-59.

<sup>16</sup> Goldsmith, *Franz Anton Mesmer*, 75-77. Nonetheless, Mesmer was strongly criticized by scientists in Vienna; see Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, 60.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Darton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 3; Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 191-192.

convulsion, which would restore the person's health, and the harmony between the person and nature.<sup>18</sup> Mesmer called his doctrine "animal magnetism."<sup>19</sup>

What promoted Mesmer's idea of fluidum most of all were his amazing successes at getting this substance to "work": Mesmer would bring his patients into a sort of epileptic shock, or into a sleepwalking trance, and thus cure them of all sorts of illnesses, from blindness to depression. Mesmer and his students accomplished amazing performances, which held viewers spellbound: they sat in such a way that the patient's legs would be locked between their own and ran their fingers throughout all parts of the patient's body, in search of the poles of the small magnets that together make up the immense magnetic force of the entire body.<sup>20</sup>

After being involved in and charged with a romantic scandal with a blind patient in Vienna in 1777,<sup>21</sup> Mesmer was forced to leave Vienna, and arrived in Paris in 1778.<sup>22</sup> His name preceded him in Paris; by 1780 he had moved on from individual treatment to group treatment, which he conducted with the help of an enormous bathtub (*baquet*) that he set up.<sup>23</sup> In 1784, Louis XVI, king of France, appointed a scientific committee to examine the science of mesmerism and the existence of Mesmer's "fluidum." The committee's conclusion was that there was no proof at all that such a fluid existed.<sup>24</sup> Mesmer, humiliated, left Paris in 1785.<sup>25</sup> Living in Switzerland, he stayed out of the public limelight and became very introverted. In the last year of his life he moved to Meersburg, Germany, and died there on March 5, 1815.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Darton, *Mesmerism*, 3-4. Regarding the element of "crisis" in Mesmer's treatments, see Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, 62-63.

<sup>19</sup> In German, *Thierischen Magnetismus*; and later in French, *magnétisme animal*. The term "animal" means something with life in it, and does not refer to beasts.

<sup>20</sup> Darton, *Mesmerism*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding this whole incident, see Goldsmith, *Franz Anton Mesmer*, 87-101; Vincent Buranelli, *The Wizard from Vienna: Franz Anton Mesmer* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1975), 75-88.

<sup>22</sup> Ellenberger argues that the true reason for Mesmer's departure for Vienna is unclear, and that attributing it to the incident with Maria Theresia Paradis is only a hypothesis. Ellenberg prefers to attribute Mesmer's departure to his unbalanced personality, arguing that he had psychopathological problems. See Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, 61. Regarding the development of mesmerism in Germany, see Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 75-110.

<sup>23</sup> Mesmer treated two hundred people in each group treatment session! Twenty people would stand around the tub, holding onto twenty poles that were attached to the tub; and behind each of these twenty people was a line of another nine patients, each tied together or holding hands, such that the magnetic fluid would be able to flow through them all. See Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, 63-64.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>25</sup> Buranelli, *Wizard from Vienna*, 167.

<sup>26</sup> Regarding this period of his life, see *ibid.*, 181-188,; 199-204.

Although Mesmer's theories were rejected, they played a significant role in the development of hypnosis and modern psychology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The royal committee that discredited Mesmer's theories did not deny his successes in putting his patients into a trance, epileptic shock, or sleep; it merely discredited the existence of fluidum. In other words, the committee did not discredit the phenomena that Mesmer demonstrated but only his interpretation of them. Mesmer's undeniable successes thus constituted the harbinger of the "unconscious," the "subconscious," and the power of suggestion. Mesmer's "discovery" of the unconscious (which was done "unconsciously"), and revelation of parapsychological forces that appeared in his patients when they were under the influence of sleep – these, along with the element of the relationship between healer and patient, which began to interest people in the wake of Mesmer's treatments, became the basis of hypnosis and Freud's psychoanalysis, which was developed in Vienna in the early twentieth century and became a springboard for the development of theories of the unconscious or subconscious in modern psychology.<sup>27</sup> Already in the early 1930s, the Jewish Viennese writer Stefan Zweig identified Mesmer and the occult movements as the basis for Freud's theories.<sup>28</sup>

The intense preoccupation with modern psychology in early-twentieth-century Vienna allowed concepts from mesmerism to become part of European discourse and enter the vocabulary of everyday speech. Although the ideas of "fluidum" and "magnetism" were rejected as scientific concepts, certain circles accepted them as part of European discourse and terminology, albeit not necessarily in their original meaning of an actual hidden fluid that is modulated by a universal magnetic force but rather in the sense of a spiritual, supernatural influence of one person on another. Additionally, James Braid brought the concept of "suggestion" into everyday terminology, referring to the use of unconscious influence to affect the thoughts of others.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, 148. See also Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 261.

<sup>28</sup> Stefan Zweig, *Mental Healers: Franz Anton Mesmer, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud* (New York: Viking Press, 1932). Regarding Mesmer's role as the founder of the basis of modern psychology, see also: Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). On Mesmer as the basis for Freud, see also: Robert W. Marks, *The Story of Hypnotism* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947), 58-97; Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 141.

<sup>29</sup> James Braid (1795–1860), known as the father of modern hypnosis, was a Scottish surgeon and physiologist who personally encountered mesmerism on November 13, 1841. A Swedish mesmerist name Charles Lafontaine (1803–1892) demonstrated mesmerism of patients before a crowd in

## C. Mesmerism and the Jewish World

The teachings of mesmerism, already in their early days in the late eighteenth century, seeped into the European Jewish world, which was naturally influenced, willingly or unwillingly, by the intellectual developments that were occurring around it.<sup>30</sup> Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger (1798-1871), one of the leaders of Orthodox Jewry in Germany (known as “the *Arukh La-ner*” after his Talmudic novella of that name), was asked to deal with the following question: is mesmerism “witchcraft” (*kishuf*), and thus forbidden by Jewish law, or is it not? This was not merely a theoretical question but had a real-life application: is it permissible for a Jew to receive treatment “using the power of *magnetisieren*”? This question was addressed to the rabbi in 1852 by the Jewish community of Amsterdam and referred to one of the later transformations of Mesmer’s theory of “animal magnetism,” namely the theory of hypnosis, which was beginning to develop in the second half of the nineteenth century. The questioner describes a deep hypnotic state in which the patient is under total anesthesia (lack of feeling), and, out of this deep sleep, displays certain supernatural phenomena. For example, the patient, while completely asleep, will describe events that are occurring in some faraway place, of which the patient cannot possibly have any previous information; this phenomenon is called clairvoyance. Ettlinger’s response to this question constitutes the first halakhic discussion of mesmerism, as far as I am aware:

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Manchester, and Braid was in the crowd. Braid was convinced that during the mesmerism, these patients were in an entirely different physical state and different state of consciousness. At this event the idea suddenly came to Braid that he had discovered the natural apparatus of psychophysiology that lay behind these authentic phenomena. See William S. Kroger and Michael D. Yapko, *Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis in Medicine, Dentistry, and Psychology* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2008), 3. This idea resulted in five public lectures that he gave in Manchester later that month. See James Braid, *Neurypnology: Or the Rationale of Nervous Sleep, Considered in Relation with Animal Magnetism* (London: J. Churchill, 1843), 2. Braid rejected Mesmer’s idea of fluidum and instead came up with a “pure” psychological model, which made use of the concepts “conscious” and “unconscious” and attributed mesmerism’s super-normal powers of healing and perception to the intensive concentration that can be caused artificially by hypnosis. See Kripal, *Esalen*, 141; Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 184-186, 287-288.

<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that even before the development of mesmerism one can find Jewish examples of hypnotic activities and certain individuals who had hypnotic abilities, whether knowingly or unknowingly. The difference is that in the wake of mesmerism, modern psychology and psychiatry developed, and these hypnotic phenomena were attributed more and more to the workings of the human soul (the “unconscious”) rather than to magic or to the powers of the practitioner. For a discussion of Jews with hypnotic powers from the thirteenth century through the Ba’al Shem Tov, see Moshe Idel, “‘The Besht Passed His Hand over His Face’: On the Besht’s Influence on His Followers – Some Remarks,” in *After Spirituality: Studies in Mystical Traditions*, ed. Philip Wexler and Jonathan Garb (New York: P. Lang, 2012), 96.

With God's help. Altona, Tevet [5]612 [=January 1852]. To the Jewish community of Amsterdam, may God preserve it, Amen!

*Question:* There is a pious, prominent individual, who has fallen ill, and he has been advised to seek treatment by means of the power that they call *magnetisieren*; this treatment makes the patient asleep, to feel no sensation at all. According to what they tell, the patient undergoes a great change, and becomes a different man. They say that wondrous things happen: the patient can know what is going on far away, and can tell what is going on in secret places, and the like. Therefore, this pious man is hesitant to undergo this treatment, for it seems that it uses supernatural spiritual forces, and therefore he is concerned that it involves the working of the Forces of Impurity (*koḥot ha-tum'ah*), which any righteous person will avoid. This pious man will follow whatever you instruct him, O rabbi; so, what do you say to do?

*Answer:* I have consulted non-Jewish scholars regarding their opinion of the power of *magnetisieren* – whether it actually causes any changes in nature, as they claim, or not. I have found that their views differ: some say that the whole thing is a complete lie, and nothing actually happens, but rather the patient's imaginative powers are elevated to the point that he thinks he is seeing wondrous things; others say that indeed, the miraculous visions do occur, and they surely must have some natural cause, but we do not understand it [...] Therefore, in my opinion, even if it is true that we cannot find any natural explanation of how *magnetisieren* can cause such great changes, nonetheless, we do not need to be concerned that it is caused by the Forces of Impurity, for it is clear from the halakhic authorities and the ruling in the *Arba'a Turim* and *Shulhan Arukh* (section *Yoreh De'ah* §155) that one is allowed to receive treatment that is performed by means of a spell (*lahash*) cast by an idolater, as long as it is not certain that the practitioner is actually mentioning the name of a foreign deity as part of the spell [...] Surely, such a spell has no basis in natural processes, but nonetheless we are not concerned that it might be using the Forces of Impurity; rather, we attribute its working to one of many natural processes that we do not yet understand. So why should we be any more concerned about *magnetisieren*, whose practitioners believe that it is a natural process, not a spiritual one [...] And thus, there is no halakhic problem with seeking treatment through *magnetisieren*, whose practitioners say that it is a natural process, even though they are unable to understand its natural basis [...] We cannot forbid such behaviors

except where the Torah has explicitly forbidden them. Therefore, in my humble opinion, it is permitted to seek treatment by means of *magnetisieren*, even for a patient who is not deathly ill. And may he receive help from God.

Jacob the Small [the rabbi's signature, an expression of humility]<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Rabbi Ettlinger permits the use of mesmerism and distinguishes between “magnetism,” on the one hand, and “witchcraft” or “a spell,” on the other, based on the subjective understanding of the practitioner. If the practitioner truly believes that the treatment operates according to “a natural process,” even if there is no convincing scientific explanation, then it is not witchcraft, nor use of “the name of a foreign deity” or “the Powers of Impurity.” Indeed, Mesmer consistently tried to provide scientific explanations for his treatments, even after the scientific community had rejected him; in the last year of his life he wrote a long “scientific” book in which, once again, he explained his theories.<sup>32</sup> Rabbi Ettlinger's opinion is that the practitioners' attempts to explain the various phenomena naturalistically make these treatments halakhically permissible, and he distinguishes between these practices, on the one hand, and the use of Forces of Impurity or names of foreign deities, on the other.<sup>33</sup>

The growing popularity of mesmerism, which, expectedly, aroused great wonder among the masses, was an inspiration also for Jewish writers and inspired powerful literary motifs. Isaac Baer Levinson (1788-1860), one of the pioneering writers of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) in the Russian Empire, who studied in Galicia in his youth, wrote an anti-Hasidic satire that mentions Mesmer and the name of his theory already in the book's subtitle. The book is called: *The Words of the Righteous with the Valley of the Rephaim: It is the vision in the world of Atsilut, which one of the*

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<sup>31</sup> R. Jacob Ettlinger, *Benei Tziyyon Responsa*, vol. 1, §67. See also Jacob Bazak, *Lemala min HaHushim [Above the Senses]* (Tel Aviv, 1968), 42-43 (Hebrew).

<sup>32</sup> See Mesmer, *Mesmerismus oder System der Wechsel-Beziehungen: Theorie und Anwendungen des Thierischen Magnetismus* (Berlin, 1814) (German). This title shows that even in Mesmer's lifetime, his theory was being called “mesmerism,” after his own name, and not just “animal magnetism.” It is unclear whether Mesmer had advanced the use of this name over the course of his lifetime or, instead, used it only at the end of his days simply because it had become the accepted term among the masses, who preferred to call the theory after the name of its originator and not by its “scientific” name.

<sup>33</sup> A similar attitude toward hypnosis is expressed in a halakhic responsum by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, a halakhic authority from the second half of the twentieth century; see *Iggerot Moshe Responsa* (Bnei Berak, 1981), section *Yoreh De'ah* vol. 3, §44 (Hebrew): “Regarding your question of whether it is permitted to use hypnotism as a treatment – I have discussed this with people who know a bit about it, and also with Rabbi J. E. Henkin, and we do not see any halakhic problem in it, for there is no witchcraft in it, for it is a natural phenomenon that certain people have the power to bring upon patients with weak nerves or the like.”

visionaries (“*somnabul*”, in the vernacular) saw by means of the techniques and mystical *tiqqunim* of Mesmer (“*mesmerism*”, in the vernacular), which is called *magnetismus*. This satire, which was published in Odessa in 1867, includes a description of an Egyptian rabbi named Levai who knows how to use Mesmer’s secrets to perform countless wonders. He uses these “*tiqqunim*” (mystical repairs) to heal several dangerously ill people.<sup>34</sup> This rabbi brings the patients into a hypnotic trance, such that “several sick people, when the sleep falls upon them, see” wondrous visions. While they are asleep, the patients “answer each question, and speak from the World of *Atsilut*. They speak of what is above [our world] and what is below, of the living and the dead, and of spiritual matters, regarding whatever is asked of them.”<sup>35</sup>

Levinson uses the patients’ state of hypnotic sleep as a literary tool to reveal the deceit and corruption of the Hasidic leaders. At the end of the treatment, says the Egyptian rabbi, “I remove my hands from the patient, to restore him to his original state, for his strength has already become weak.”<sup>36</sup> This anti-Hasidic satire thus shows acquaintance with mesmerism, which had reached Eastern Europe.

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<sup>34</sup> Isaac Baer Levinson, *Divrei Tsaddikim Im Emek Refa'im* (Odessa, 1867), 1 (Hebrew).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. The expression “I remove my hand” can be interpreted in two ways: either as a general description of stopping the hypnotic treatment or as literal removal of the healer’s hands from before the patient’s face.

## D. Menachem Ekstein, Mesmerism, and Imaginative Technique

Although Ekstein claims that he will use only terms from within Judaism in his book *Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism*,<sup>37</sup> in fact he uses the words “fluidum” and “suggestiya” (i.e., suggestion). For him, “fluidum” is not a liquid, as it is for Mesmer, but a hidden force that is found in the world, that moves from one person to another, and is expressed by means of the influence of one person on another. By means of this hidden force, Ekstein explains the value that Hasidism places on gatherings of Hasidim; and, above all, he argues that this hidden force is of great value in Hasidic teachings:

It is well known that Hasidism places great value on gatherings on Sabbaths and festivals. The reason for this is that it takes account of the influences and forces that pass between people. [...] For we often see how when a person is happy, he can bring joy to a whole group of people, simply by appearing among them, without taking any active steps to entertain them; it is as if invisible lines of joy emanate from him and penetrate into their hearts, and thus arouse feelings of joy in them, as well. Similarly, when someone is sad and bitter, he can bring sadness to others simply by being near them, as if clouds of anguish go in front of him and spread out into the hearts of the others. Hasidism places great value on this hidden force (*fluidum*),<sup>38</sup> which issues from every individual; for in matters of religion, this force is even more powerful than in other matters.<sup>39</sup>

How amazed will all the wise men of the world be when they realize that everything that they currently know about these wondrous forces that people receive from and spread to each other (*suggestiya*) are only like a drop from the sea in comparison to what Hasidism knows about this.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism*, 1: “In what ways will it be possible for us to study the way of contemplation and reach it? Let us try and strive to give an answer to this question, *an answer that is anthologized from various places in the books of the Hasidim*, here arranged systematically” (emphasis added). See also his introduction to the Yiddish version: “In my book, I have made a first attempt to find appropriate definitions and an appropriate style to express the principles of Hasidic thought, so that they can be accessible to the general reader; *everything is taken from primary sources*” (emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> In the second edition of the book (p. 110), and in the third edition (p. 107), the word “fluidum” is removed. However, the word “suggestiya” was left (see second edition, p. 112; third edition, p. 110).

<sup>39</sup> *Mental Conditions for Achieving Hasidism*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

He explains the influence of the Hasidic *rebbe*<sup>41</sup> on his followers as being due to the same hidden force, which emanates from the *rebbe*:

If we come close to a person that has already freed his soul from all doubts and hesitation by using them for the goodness of his soul, for he has acquired clear, certain knowledge of his Creator, and this true light already shines thoroughly in him – then we necessarily feel the hidden forces that emanate from him. The greater a person is in spirituality and spiritual perfection, the greater and stronger will be the forces that emanate from him. And especially if the people that draw near to him are also trying to free their souls from doubts and uncertainties, then they will have an even greater experience of the light that emanates from those great people.<sup>42</sup>

Ekstein uses this hidden force also to explain Hasidic prayer: “If Hasidim pray together, and among them are several great individuals, who have already elevated their souls to a high level, then the room will be full of godly lines, as it were, and the spiritual inspiration passes from one person to another – the greater ones influence the lesser ones.”<sup>43</sup>

The common factor behind all these terms – fluidum, light, lines, godly lines – is the basically mesmeristic conception that there is a cosmic force in general, and that there are certain skilled people who know how to make use of it to do good things.<sup>44</sup> In Kabbalistic terms, this comes out thus: there are certain men (such as the *rebbe*) who are able to draw forces from on high, “godly lines,” and use them in this world to draw

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<sup>41</sup> *Rebbe* is a Yiddish word derived from the Hebrew word *rabbi*, which means “master,” “teacher,” or “mentor.” The term *rebbe* is used specifically by Hasidim to refer to the leader of their Hasidic court.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51. See what he says there about a strong, extraordinary ability to influence others, even against their will: “For there are some extraordinary instances, in which the words remove all veils, and penetrate the heart with great force, even against the will of the listeners. In general, though, the force goes through only to people who are listening intently, and know how to nullify themselves in favor of the speaker, and want his words to influence them.” Ekstein shows here that he understands one of the basic principle of psychotherapeutic and psychiatric treatment: that the therapist and the patient need to cooperate for there to be any influence.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>44</sup> Of course, one can find similar concepts already in antiquity, and in Jewish literature. My point is that the terms that are used to describe these concepts in their modern form are based on Mesmer’s teachings and the subsequent development of psychology. We find similar neo-platonic concepts expressed by the Greek word *pneuma* (πνεῦμα) in theurgy and Hellenistic magic, and later in Islamic philosophy and mysticism, translated as “spirituality.” This “spirituality” functions as a cosmic force, which is between humanity and God, and we find the idea of humanity’s ability to “bring down the spirituality.” Regarding all this, and the attitudes toward it of Judah Halevi and Maimonides, see Shlomo Pines, “On the term Rūhāniyyāt and its Origin and on Judah Halevi’s Doctrine,” *Tarbiz* 57 (1988): 511-540 (Hebrew).

emanations, in order to emanate them onto others: “The greater ones influence the lesser ones.”

Aaron Marcus (1842-1916) was an author, scholar of the Hebrew language, and active member of the Zionist movement in Galicia. He was born and raised in Hamburg, and studied there with the students of Rabbi Isaac Bernays (1792-1849), the rabbi of Hamburg.<sup>45</sup> Marcus was disappointed by the spiritual life of West European Jewry, so in 1862 he moved to Eastern Europe and settled in Cracow. He was enchanted with, and “caught in the net of” Hasidism, and became a follower of Rabbi Solomon of Radomsko (1801-1866) and Rabbi David Moses of Czortków (1827-1903).<sup>46</sup> Marcus was a unique individual, and the first to write a modern interpretation of Hasidic thought, which, moreover, he did in German.<sup>47</sup> Marcus viewed the Hasidic teachings of Eastern Europe as a new psychological theory, which brought freshness to Jewish spiritual life. For Marcus, psychological phenomena such as “suggestion” and “autosuggestion” (the ability to convince oneself to the point of influencing the physical) explained the wondrous phenomena that he saw and heard about among the Hasidim. When a certain Hasid agreed to die in place of the Sadigura Rebbe, and thus to redeem the latter from death, Marcus explained this as an example of the phenomenon of autosuggestion:

When the Sadigura Rebbe returned home, he became so weak that the doctors worried that he might die any minute. [...] Then his brother, R. Dov of Leova, went out to the people, and said: “O Hasidim, do you have anyone among you who is

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<sup>45</sup> On R. Isaac Bernays, see Yehuda Horowitz, “Bernays, Yitshak ben Ya’akov,” in *The Hebrew Encyclopedia* (Jerusalem, 1967), vol. 9, column 864 (Hebrew); Isaac Heinemann, “The relationship between S. R. Hirsch and his teacher Isaac Bernays,” *Zion* 16 (1951): 69-90 (Hebrew). It is worth mentioning that Isaac Bernays’s granddaughter married Sigmund Freud, see Margaret Muckenhoupt, *Sigmund Freud: Explorer of the Unconscious* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26 (I would like to thank my friend Gavriel Wasserman for bringing this to my attention). Regarding a Zionist pamphlet that Marcus published, and Theodor Herzl’s reaction to the pamphlet, see Herzl’s article “Dr. Gidmann’s ‘National Judaism,’” found in Hebrew on the Ben-Yehuda Project, [http://benyehuda.org/herzl/herzl\\_009.html](http://benyehuda.org/herzl/herzl_009.html).

<sup>46</sup> See Meir Wunder, *Meorei Galicia: Encyclopedia of Galician Rabbis and Scholars* (Jerusalem, 1986), vol. 3, columns 969-971 (Hebrew).

<sup>47</sup> See Moses Tsinovitsh, “R. Aaron Marcus – the Pioneer of Hasidic Literature,” *Ortodoksishe Yugent Bleter* 39 (1933): 7-8 (Yiddish); Vili Aron, “Aaron Marcus, the ‘German’ who became a Hasid,” *Yivo Bleter* 29 (1947): 143-148 (Yiddish); Jochebed Segal, *HeHasid MeHamburg: Sippur Hayyav shel R. Aharon Markus* (Jerusalem, 1978) (Hebrew); Markus Marcus, *Ahron Marcus: Die Lebensgeschichte eines Chossid* (Montreux, 1966) (German). Regarding Marcus’s authenticity in his descriptions, see Uriel Gelman, “The Great Wedding in Uścitug: The Making of a Hasidic Myth,” *Tarbiz* 80, 4 (2013): 574-580 (Hebrew). For certain doubts that can be raised about Marcus’s reliability, see *ibid.*, 590-594; for further clear mistakes that Marcus made, see Gershon Kitizis, “Aaron Marcus’s ‘Hasidism,’” *HaMa’ayan* 21 (1981): 64-88 (Hebrew).

prepared to take upon himself the decree of death that has been decreed upon my brother?" [...] Immediately, a certain young scholar, R. Mordecai Michel of Lisk, volunteered to rescue the *rebbe* with his own life. One might explain this as being by the power of autosuggestion, but one cannot deny the fact. The volunteer became sick after about a day, invited the members of the burial society, happily bade farewell to his friends, and departed this life. The *rebbe* recovered.<sup>48</sup>

Like Ekstein, Marcus explains the influence of the *rebbe* on his Hasidim in terms of the power of suggestion. Marcus presents his readers with a story that he has heard in a first-hand account – from the very individual who experienced the suggestive influence of the Sadigura Rebbe, when he met with him:

I have had the opportunity to observe this phenomenon in reliable personalities. A certain Russian [Jewish] soldier, named Abramowitz, was the son of a border-smuggler [...]. The son was even more coarse and boorish than the father; he had no semblance of any religious feeling. He encountered me in a trading house where he was working, and once told me about his experience: he escaped from Klept,<sup>49</sup> risking his life, along with three other soldiers; and after a number of adventures, he arrived at Sadigura, past the Romanian border. "I don't know what happened to me," he said, "but when the Rebbe spoke to me, I broke into uncontrollable tears. I had never cried like this since my childhood." I have no doubt that there wasn't a single spark of religiosity in that man, which could have caused this crying to occur by self-suggestion.<sup>50</sup>

In other words, Marcus argues that we cannot explain this case as an example of autosuggestion, but only as absolute suggestion (of one individual on another). The Russian Jewish soldier did not have any concealed religious spark with him; hence he could be moved only by the *rebbe*'s direct influence. Marcus recognizes and values Mesmer's theory of magnetism, and writes: "Among all the other evidence [...] of the validity of 'animal magnetism,' we must note the precise testimony given by the eyewitness 'Vigors' (in his book *The Bible and New Discoveries*, 1868), who has determined without a doubt that we are dealing with a scientific problem in nature [...]"

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<sup>48</sup> Aaron Marcus, *Hasidism*, trans. from the German by Moshe Schoenfeld (Bnei Berak: Netzach, 1980), 242 (Hebrew). The German title of the book is *Der Chassidismus: Eine Kulturgeschichtliche Studie* (Pleschen: Jeschurun, 1901).

<sup>49</sup> This is evidently the name of a place, but I have not been able to identify it.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

if Napoleon and Mohammed succeeded in gathering hundreds of thousands of people around them, we cannot attribute this to their words, but only to their suggestive powers.”<sup>51</sup>

We see a relationship between developments in psychological-hypnotic praxis, on the one hand, and Hasidic practice, on the other, in Marcus’s descriptions of Rabbi Shalom Rokeah of Belz (1781-1855), who would heal physical and mental ailments by making hand-motions, similar to hypnosis:

[The Belzer Rebbe] was an expert at treating spiritual diseases and paralyses, which all the doctors had despaired of ever treating. In thousands of cases, his activity was confirmed by Jews and gentiles, nobles and peasants; it aroused the interest of heads of colleges, who subsequently spent many decades trying to explain the phenomenon from the point of view of the new science of psychology, which is influenced by the spiritist approach.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 385; see also there pp. 381-382, about a Jewish woman who underwent hypnotism therapy and demonstrated supernatural powers during this treatment: “Dr. Bini Cohen, Bismarck’s personal doctor [...] hypnotized the wife of R. Gitsh Folk, a Polish Jewish woman, living in Hamburg, who did not know how to read or write German, and had fallen dangerously ill.”

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 225. He mentions there that the Belzer Rebbe performed his treatments by passing his hands over the patient’s face. On the Ba’al Shem Tov’s use of influence of hands, see Idel, “The Besht Passed His Hand over His Face,” 79-106.

## E. Changes in the Role of *Ba'alei Shem* (Wonder-Workers)

Ekstein's developed imagery exercises cannot be explained purely against the background of mesmerism. Along with "animal magnetism," there was another central factor of influence, namely, developments in the concept of imagination in Western philosophy. European philosophy, from that of the Greeks to that of modern times, saw developments in the attitude toward imagination that influenced modern psychology. Whereas Plato viewed imagination as a base, deceptive force, modern philosophy considers it a productive force that can create a whole universe of values and original truths, and named it "creative imagination." Following Kant and German idealism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the "creative imagination" was formally recognized by the central stream of Western philosophy, which directly influenced modern psychology.<sup>53</sup>

As already alluded to above, the techniques of imagination in Jewish mysticism changed over the centuries – from linguistic techniques in the Middle Ages, to imagining a single scene in early Hasidism, to imagining an entire plot in the early twentieth century. It seems to me that we must understand this development against the background of parallel developments in techniques of imagination in Western psychology. Already in studies in the late 1940s, Raphael Straus noted that the changes in the roles of *Ba'alei Shem* (Jewish mystical wonder-workers) must be understood in the context of the development of mesmerism.<sup>54</sup> The "*Ba'al Shem* of Michelstadt," Rabbi Isaac Zeck Leyb Wormser (1768-1847), the rabbi of the city of Michelstadt, Germany, was known for his healing powers. His medical "miracles" won him great popularity in Germany, both among Jews and non-Jews. His private journals, which describe his treatments over a period of two years, list 1500 patients from seven hundred places. Most are women, either during pregnancy or after childbirth, who have been diagnosed with various nervous disorders. His prescriptions for them usually are the recitation of psalms, either by the community or by relatives; giving charity secretly; checking *mezuzot* and *tefillin*; changing the patient's name; wearing gold rings inscribed with the name of Raphael (the angel of healing); wearing white clothes; and

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<sup>53</sup> Regarding this development, see Mayer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1953); Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> Raphael Straus, "The Baal-Shem of Michelstadt: Mesmerism and Cabbala," *Historica Judaica* VIII, 2 (1946): 135-148.

occasionally also fasting.<sup>55</sup> Often the *Ba'al Shem* of Michelstadt is asked to give advice about nonmedical matters. His diaries indicate that he believed every physical symptom is psychological in origin.<sup>56</sup>

Karl Grözinger identifies a change in the understanding of the role of the *Ba'al Shem*, which occurred in the eighteenth century – from a healer of physical ailments to a healer of spiritual ailments; from a healer of the body to a healer of the soul. This change is evident in the roles of the *Ba'al Shem* of Michelstadt, of the *Ba'alei Shem* of eighteenth-century Frankfurt, and of the Ba'al Shem Tov (Israel Ba'al Shem, founder of Hasidism).<sup>57</sup> Straus maintains that the activities of the *Ba'al Shem* of Michelstadt, and specifically his focus on spiritual healing, must be understood in light of the development of Mesmer's teachings:

Considering Wormser's interest in scholarship, one cannot refer his miracle-healings to old cabbalistic leanings alone. True, in his lifetime the rise of a scientific way of miracle-healing, under the name of 'Mesmerism' had created a sensation in Europe. It is unlikely that Wormser should not have learned of Mesmer's 'animalic magnetism' during his stay in Frankfort or Mannheim, and not have combined this then famous theory with his own cabbalistic views.<sup>58</sup>

All this is even more true of Ekstein. It should be borne in mind that Ekstein developed his imagery exercises in a specific place and time – in Vienna, in the years following World War I.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 139-142.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 143; see examples there and on the subsequent page.

<sup>57</sup> Karl E. Grözinger, "Zekl Leib Wormser, the Ba'al Shem of Michelstadt," in *Judaism, Topics, Fragments, Faces, Identities: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Rivka*, ed. Haviva Pedaya and Ephraim Meir (Be'er Sheva, 2007), 507 (Hebrew). See also his book: Karl E. Grözinger, *Der Ba'al Schem von Michelstadt: ein deutsch-jüdisches Heiligenleben zwischen Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2010) (German).

<sup>58</sup> Straus, "Baal-Shem of Michelstadt," 146.

## F. Vienna: Authority and Mysticism

Carl Schorske, in his seminal work *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, discusses the connection between the “political” and “cultural” dimensions of Vienna at the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Traditional Austrian culture, unlike that of its neighbor Germany, was not concerned with philosophy, ethics, or science; instead Austria was primarily concerned with aesthetics. Vienna’s major contribution at the turn of the century was in the realm of the arts: architecture, theater, and music. Art became almost a religion in Vienna, a source of meaning and sustenance for the soul.<sup>60</sup>

Schorske argues that this phenomenon stemmed directly from the political dimension. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the rise of right-wing, conservative, anti-Semitic influences led to the collapse of liberalism and left the small liberal intellectual community in Vienna shocked and alienated. The strong tendency among the remnants of this liberal upper class was simply to despair of the political situation, and to turn instead toward aesthetic romanticism – and the occult. That is, the world of aesthetics became, for the liberals, a refuge from the rising, racist political reality. Paradoxically, in their very escape from reality to art, this elite group created an impressive high culture.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the extraordinary vibrancy of Viennese culture at the close of the nineteenth century resulted from the weakening of the liberal bourgeoisie, which ended up imitating the aesthetic of the nobility.

Although Schorske’s views are not gospel truth or immune to criticism, they are challenging and have produced great resonance in the scholarly community. Steven Beller argues that Schorske has ignored the Jewish aspect,<sup>62</sup> and that in fact, Viennese high culture around 1900 was effectively Jewish culture. The leading figures in the liberal bourgeois intelligentsia were Jewish, and they constituted the basis of the cultural revival. According to Beller, the Viennese culture was fundamentally Jewish,<sup>63</sup> and the work of Sigmund Freud or Karl Kraus was “nothing other than a culture

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<sup>59</sup> Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1980).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-23.

<sup>62</sup> Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>63</sup> In his book he attempts to define the culture as inherently Jewish, not just as a culture produced by Jews.

produced against its Viennese environment.”<sup>64</sup> Either way – whether the liberal Viennese group is defined as Jewish or merely as liberal – it fled from the racist “real world” of politics and closed itself off in the realm of aesthetics and art, which, in a certain sense, are the world of imagination and mysticism.

One domain of the world of mysticism and imagination is that of music, which underwent development in Vienna by the Austrian Jewish composer Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951). Schönberg, the leader of the “Composers of the Second Viennese School” and a trailblazer in twentieth-century atonal music, composed music for some poems by the German poet Stefan George (1868-1933). George’s absolute adherence to “sacred art,” and his mystical sense of humanity’s unity with the cosmos, attracted Schönberg’s attention. “George’s poetry had the synesthetic characteristics appropriate to the artist-priest’s mystical unifying function: a language magical in sonority and an imagery rich in color.”<sup>65</sup>

The bitter results of World War I intensified the Viennese mood of escape from real life to the world of mysticism and imagination. As Stefan Zweig wrote with his characteristic sharpness:

How wild, anarchic and unreal were those years, years in which, with the dwindling value of money all other values in Austria and Germany began to slip! [...] Every extravagant idea that was not subject to regulation reaped a golden harvest: theosophy, occultism, spiritualism, somnambulism, anthroposophy, palm-reading, graphology, yoga and Paracelsism [paracelsianism]. Anything that gave hope of newer and greater thrills [...] found a tremendous market; [...] unconditionally prescribed, however, was any representation of normality and moderation.<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, Zweig characterizes the flight to “every extravagant idea that was not subject to regulation” as a reactionary activity, a response to the sorry state of the country and of politics:

A tremendous inner revolution occurred during those first post-war years. Something besides the army had been crushed: faith in the infallibility of the authority to which we had been trained to over-submissiveness in our own youth.

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<sup>64</sup> See Michael A. Meyer, “Vienna and the Jews: A Review Essay,” *AJS Review* 16 (1991): 236-239. Meyer presents Beller’s analysis as being the opposite of Schorske’s, but I am not convinced of this.

<sup>65</sup> Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 348-349.

<sup>66</sup> Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, trans. Anthea Bell (University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 301.

[...] It was only after the smoke of war had lifted that the terrible destruction that resulted became visible. How could an ethical commandment still count as holy which sanctioned murder and robbery under the cloak of heroism and requisition for four long years? How could a people rely on the promises of a state which had annulled all those obligations, to its citizens which it could not conveniently fulfill?<sup>67</sup>

Obeying authority had been an integral part of Austrian culture. The outcomes of World War I, however, fostered a change: a rebellion against authority and a search for new values. In Zweig's view, this rebellion afforded leverage to the mystical and occult culture that flourished in Vienna after the war. Although Schorske's book does not deal with the postwar period, his theory that the efflorescence of art, imagination, and mysticism marked a flight from the bleak political reality is even more applicable to that era, post-World War I.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 297-298.

## G. Vienna: The Meeting Place of Hasidic Psychology and Western Psychology

This leads us back to Menachem Ekstein's psychology and mystical teachings, which, as noted, he developed in Vienna after World War I. It must be noted that at the time of the war tens of thousands of Jews came to Vienna as war refugees, most from the frontier cities of the Austrian Empire in Galicia and Bukowina.<sup>68</sup> These refugees brought an East European Jewish spirit to Vienna, a Western city. Among them were many Hasidic *rebbe*s along with their courts, such as the Rebbe of Czortków, the Rebbe of Husiatyn, the Rebbe of Sadigura, the Rebbe of Kopyczyńce, the Rebbe of Storozhynets, the Rebbe of Stanislaw, and the Rebbe of Skolye (Skole). All these *rebbe*s gathered around them a concentration of thousands of Hasidim, who continued their East European ways of life almost unchanged and "introduced a new Jewish bloodstream [...] into the arteries of the Viennese community."<sup>69</sup> It was because of this concentration of Hasidic courts that the first conference, the "Great Congress," of the *haredi* movement Agudath Israel took place in Vienna, and the movement's headquarters and monthly journal, *HaDerekh*, were based there.

The encounter of the Hasidim of Galicia with the progressive culture of Vienna was fraught.<sup>70</sup> Although secularization and enlightenment had also made inroads in Galicia, Hasidic writings indicate that the Western culture of Vienna threatened their traditional lifestyle more considerably. Rabbi Solomon Hayyim Friedman (1887-1972), the Rebbe of Sadigura, moved to Vienna during World War I and continued to conduct his court there. His sermons from that period have been collected and published as a book, *Hayyei Shelomo*.<sup>71</sup> In 1918 he gave a sermon for the opening of a new library of traditional Jewish works in Vienna. In it he discusses the uniqueness of Hasidism and

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<sup>68</sup> Regarding the 77,000 Jewish refugees in Vienna at the time of World War I, see Moshe Ungerfeld, *Vienna* (Tel Aviv: N. Dreemer, 1946), 120-124 (Hebrew). On the flow of Jews from Galicia and Bukovina to Vienna, see David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 67-100. According to Rechter's count, 150,000 Jewish refugees arrived in Vienna over the course of World War I. See *ibid.*, 74, 80-82; and see there p. 72, where he says that this number increased anti-Semitism. On Jewish immigration before World War I, see Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 13-45.

<sup>69</sup> Ungerfeld, *Vienna*, 129-130. See also Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *Jewish Politics in Vienna 1918-1938* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 138-146.

<sup>70</sup> On the tensions between the liberal Austrian Jews and the Orthodox immigrants from Galicia, see Rechter, *Jews of Vienna*, 179-186.

<sup>71</sup> Solomon Hayyim Friedman, *Hayyei Shelomo* (Jerusalem, 2006) (Hebrew).

its ability to rescue the displaced Jews who wander from place to place after the war,<sup>72</sup> and find themselves in Western cities that “defile the soul.” The Rebbe speaks of the powerful influence of the West and the failure of many Jews to resist it, as evident in their abandonment of the Torah and its commandments, especially their violation of the Sabbath. To counteract this trend, the *rebbe* calls on his listeners to open a network of Jewish schools for children:

And in order to bring Jewish children to the chambers of Torah, we need to establish schools for learning Torah, to which parents will bring their children. We need to stop the flow of hundreds of thousands of Jews to the four corners of the earth, in the aftermath of the war, to places that defile the Jewish spirit and bring them to throw off the yoke of the Torah and its commandments, and, especially, to desecrate the Sabbath.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, in Vienna, Ekstein and many like him were exposed both to a more Western, secular culture than they had known in Galicia (as emerges from the testimony of the Sadigura Rebbe) and to mystical and occult culture and mentalities, as evident in Stefan Zweig’s description of contemporary Vienna. Indeed, mesmerism and hypnosis became topics of renewed interest in Vienna already in the second half of the nineteenth century, both in Western esoteric circles and in Jewish mystical and Hasidic circles. Already in 1856 Judah Barash published a book in Hebrew that dealt, among other things, with mesmerism and parapsychology.<sup>74</sup> He uses the teachings of mesmerism to explain the phenomena of dreaming and visions, and his sympathy toward these teachings is overt: “The word *mesmerismus* is from Mesmer, the name of a renowned doctor, who lived about fifty years ago in Vienna and Paris. He was the first to discover this fact. [...] Those readers who know non-Jewish languages can find many books in German,

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<sup>72</sup> In 1915 there were about 600,000 Jews who were homeless as a result of the war; see Rechter, *Jews of Vienna*, 68.

<sup>73</sup> Friedman, *Hayyei Shlomo*, 264. See also his sermons that discuss the tension between the Orthodox immigrants and the Jews of Vienna, the *Ostjuden* and *Westjuden*, *ibid.*, 277: “The Sabbath-desecrators claim that they too are ‘good Jews’ [...] but those ‘good Jews’ have torn down, and continue to tear down, the foundations of Judaism, on which the whole structure stands; and without structure, the nation cannot stand” (Vienna, 31<sup>st</sup> day of the Omer [May 18-19], 1935). On the cultural assimilation of the *Westjuden* of Vienna, see Rozenblit, *Jews of Vienna 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity*.

<sup>74</sup> Judah Barash, *Otsar Hokhmah: Kolel Yesodei Kol HaYedi’ot MeHelkat HaPilosophit Bah Yedubbar MeHaHiggayon, MiMah She’Ahar HaTeva, MiYedi’at HaNefesh UMiPilosophiyyat HaDat* (Vienna, 1856) (Hebrew). This book is only a summary of eight pamphlets that survive, in the author’s handwriting, in the National Library of Israel, department of manuscripts, number B 758 38 1893.

French, English, and Italian, explaining these wondrous matters.<sup>75</sup> Later on, Rabbi Solomon Zevi Schick (1844-1916) used this book as a source for providing mesmeristic explanations of various parapsychological phenomena that are mentioned in medieval Hebrew writings.<sup>76</sup> In 1879 another Hebrew book was published in Vienna, called *Torat Hayyim*, which explains mesmerism and deals considerably with the “unconscious,” a burning topic of modern Western psychology at the time.<sup>77</sup>

Rabbi Jekuthiel Aryeh Kamelhar, Ekstein’s closest teacher, also ended up in Vienna after World War I and later emigrated to the United States.<sup>78</sup> In his book *Dor De’ah* he explains fundamental Hasidic ideas, such as “the ascent of the soul,” on the basis of the teachings of mesmerism and principles of psychiatric study that had developed in Vienna:

It has become clear that the art of somnambulism, which a certain scholar and doctor invented in Vienna in 1776,<sup>79</sup> can numb the body’s physical forces; [...] and by means of such inventions, wondrous powers of the soul have been discovered, and become known to many through the books of the gentiles. [...] And thus we can understand that the Hasidic leader’s [*Tzadik*’s] soul [...] has purified all his limbs and uses them as God desires, and while the physical senses do not disturb him... the gates of heaven will be opened for him – in the inner chambers of his heart, which show the wonders of heaven [*hekhlot*], and allow him to hear prophecies about the future. [...] This is precisely the “ascent of the soul” [*Aliyat Neshama*] that is told about the Ba’al Shem Tov, may that righteous man’s memory be a blessing.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 130-131. One can find books in vernacular languages, yet from a Jewish perspective, dealing with mesmerism and parapsychological forces, such as the German book by Moritz Wiener, *Selma die Jüdische Seherin: Traumleben und Hellsehen einer durch Animalischen Magnetismus Wiederhergestellten Kranken* (Berlin, 1838) [*Selma the Jewish Seer: Dreams and Visions of a Sick Woman Who Was Treated by Animal Magnetism*]. Wiener tells of a woman named Selma who received mesmeristic treatment, entered a trance of hypnotic sleep, and saw events that were happening in distant places, about which she could not have known anything. Regarding this book, see Aharon Zeitlin, *The Other Reality* (Tel Aviv, 1967), 208-210 (Hebrew).

<sup>76</sup> Solomon Zevi Schick, *MiMoshe Ad Moshe* (Munkács, 1903), 17-20 (Hebrew). He deals with testimonies of medieval authors such as Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret (1235-1310), in his responsa, *Shut HaRashba*, §548.

<sup>77</sup> Aaron Paries, *Torat Hayyim* (Vienna, 1880) (Hebrew). He discusses mesmerism on pp. 80-81.

<sup>78</sup> See Yehoshua Mondshine, *HaTsofeh LeDoro: Rabbi Yekuthiel Aryeh Kamelhar, His Life and Works* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1987), 150-151, 154, 165 (Hebrew).

<sup>79</sup> That is, Franz Mesmer.

<sup>80</sup> Jekuthiel Aryeh Kamelhar, *Dor De’ah: Arba’ah Tekufot Hasidut Beshtit BiShenot Tav-Kuf – Tav-Resh-Kaf* [*Four Generations of Beshtian Hasidism from 1740 to 1860*] (Ashdod, 1998), 53 (Hebrew). Menachem Ekstein was familiar with Kamelhar’s books; he sometimes even funded their publication. See, for example, Kamelhar’s acknowledgments to Ekstein for funding the publication of his book *Hasidim Rishonim: Dor Dorim* (Waitzen, 1917), at the end of the preface. Note especially Kamelhar’s

Thus Vienna was a meeting place between East European Hasidic psychology and Western psychology, which was undergoing stages of accelerated development.<sup>81</sup> Here is an appropriate place to mention the 1903 meeting in Vienna between R. Shalom Ber Schneerson (1860-1920), the fifth *rebbe* of the Habad dynasty, and Sigmund Freud, an encounter that has been discussed in studies by Maya Balakirsky Katz and by Jonathan Garb.<sup>82</sup>

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affectionate words about Ekstein there: “My dear friend Menachem, who restores my soul [cf. Lamentations 1:16], may his light shine, from the city Rzesów.” See also Mondshine’s theory in *HaTsofeh LeDoro*, 150, that Kamelhar and Ekstein spent Passover together in 1918 in Vienna.

<sup>81</sup> For more discussion of the interface between Eastern and Western Europe at the turn of the century, see the foundational article by Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Orientalism and Mysticism: The Aesthetic of the Turn of the Nineteenth Century and Jewish Identity,” *Mehkerei Yerushalayim BeMahshevet Yisra’el* 3, 4 (1984): 624-681 (Hebrew); idem, “Fin-de-siècle Orientalism, the ‘Ostjuden’ and the aesthetics of Jewish self-affirmation,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 1 (1984): 96-139.

<sup>82</sup> Maya Balakirsky Katz, “An Occupational Neurosis: A Psychoanalytic Case History of a Rabbi,” *AJS Review* 34, 1 (2010): 1-31; Jonathan Garb, *Shamanic Trance in Modern Kabbalah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 145-147.

## H. Conclusions and Closing Remarks

The Hebrew literature that deals with mesmerism, the unconscious, and imagination developed specifically in Vienna, which was also the meeting point of Eastern and Western Europe during Ekstein's time there after World War I. This, and the flourishing of mysticism and rebellion against rationalism, which Zweig describes so well, are significant facts that must constantly be kept in mind when studying Ekstein's concepts.<sup>83</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Ekstein encountered the teachings of mesmerism and the study of the unconscious in Vienna, where he developed his unique imagery techniques, which make use of imagination and visualization to reveal the unconscious layers of the soul.

I have pointed out that Plato's negative attitude toward imagination turned into a positive one in modern philosophy and psychology, which viewed imagination as a productive force, "the creative imagination"; in parallel, psychotherapy developed techniques of imagery, from mesmerism to hypnosis to psychoanalysis. Although the development of imagery techniques in Kabbalah and Hasidism was not directly influenced by the development of modern psychiatry, I believe it is impossible to understand such development in Hasidism without taking into account the trends in eighteenth-century Europe, which intensified during the nineteenth century and reached a zenith in the early twentieth century.

The rabbinic attitudes toward the phenomenon of "magnetism," as taught by Franz Mesmer, are evidence of the involvement of European Jewry, in the German-speaking areas, with what was going on around them. This involvement makes possible the understanding of imagery techniques among Hasidim, against the European background from which the techniques had arisen. Moreover, this European atmosphere forms the background, to a certain extent, for understanding the channeling of such imagery techniques in Hasidism to the field of psychotherapy.

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<sup>83</sup> I intend to write at length, elsewhere, about the Hasidic vibrancy and the extensive use of imagination that occurred in immigrant Hasidic communities in Vienna after World War I. To mention one example, Rabbi David Isaac Rabinovitz (1898-1979), the Rebbe of Skole (Skolye), immigrated to Vienna after World War I where he wrote his *Book of Visions* (in three volumes), in which he describes his imagination and visions; the manuscript is today in the hands of the current Skolye Rebbe in the United States. Regarding this manuscript, see *Kovets Be'er Yitshak 3* (Brooklyn, New York: Mechon Be'er Yitshak of the Bet Midrash of the Skolye Hasidim, 2001), 18 (Hebrew). Regarding another encounter between East and West that took place in Vienna, and changed the outlook of the Rebbe Israel of Czortkóv on the writing of historiographical works, see Mondshine, *HaTsofeh LeDoro*, 153-154.

Central Europe in general, and Vienna in particular, functioned as points of contact between Western and Eastern Europe. As a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Vienna was a point of influence over Galicia, which was the cradle of Hasidism and belonged to the same empire up to World War I. German literature about psychology and hypnotism was translated into Hebrew in Vienna, and was distributed at the outskirts of the empire in Galicia. Modern psychotherapeutic techniques came to Galicia by way of Vienna and, amazingly, they were adopted into the Hasidic psychological thought of several Hasidic figures. This process intensified after World War I, when Vienna became one of the focal points of displaced people including quite a few Hasidic courts. According to our analysis, Menachem Ekstein would have encountered guided imagery techniques in Vienna after World War I, and there adopted them into his own Hasidic teachings.



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